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State settles with Texaco for cleanup

Hazardous waste storage penalties hit \$8.95 million

SACRAMENTO (AP) — A Texaco subsidiary has agreed to spend a record \$8.95 million to settle a complaint that accuses the company of improperly storing hazardous wastes at its Bakersfield facility, state officials said Tuesday.

Attorney General John Van de Kamp and state Health Director Kenneth Kizer announced the settlement, calling it the largest reached under the state's hazardous waste law and possibly the biggest of its kind in the country.

"The severity of the penalties imposed in this case are matched by the seriousness of the violations and by the potential threat to public health and safety," Van de Kamp said at a Capitol news conference.

He said state investigators found about 5,000 steel drums containing hazardous waste at the Texaco Refining and Marketing Inc. facility in northwest Bakersfield. About 2,000 of the drums were leaking, corroded or open and more than 3,000 of them were not labeled, he added.

Van de Kamp and Kizer said they had no indication that the waste had leaked into groundwater, but Van de Kamp said the situation at the refinery could have been disastrous if there had been a fire.

"Those drums were found to contain cancer-causing metals and

other compounds which require special handling," he said.

Texaco spokesmen downplayed the seriousness of the situation, contending that the waste posed "no significant risk to either our employees, the environment or the community." They said the company agreed to the settlement to avoid additional costs it might have faced if the case had gone to court.

"While technically hazardous waste, the vast majority of the materials were relatively inert and would not be considered to be hazardous outside California," said Robert Hammond, a spokesman for Texaco USA.

Hammond and Bill Bresnick, an attorney for the oil company, said most of the material stored in the drums was already there when Texaco purchased property next to its facility from another company, Tosco Corp., in 1986.

Most of the drums have already been removed, Texaco officials said.

Under the settlement, Texaco Refining and Marketing will pay \$4.5 million in civil penalties, \$500,000 to cover administrative and investigative costs and at least \$3.95 million to reduce waste production and improve waste handling procedures at its facilities.